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ABSTRACT

The treatment of black Americans in a sample of social studies filmstrips designed for use in grades four through six was appraised. The purpose was to learn whether these filmstrips fostered the concept of a pluralistic society, in which races are seen as equal and in which blacks and integrated groups have an important part. Forty film strips were analyzed by a three-member panel, using a measurement instrument derived from the Detroit public school evaluation criteria to gauge minority treatment. Results showed that there was a significant relationship between filmstrips which foster pluralism and the number and percentage of black American characters illustrated in the filmstrips. Filmstrips were most likely to be acceptable which showed blacks throughout the strips and also which depicted occupations of varying social status. As only six of the 40 filmstrips viewed were deemed acceptable, the author concludes that many more unprejudiced filmstrips are needed. (Author/JK)

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AN APPRAISAL OF THE TREATMENT OF BLACK AMERICANS IN SELECTED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES FILMSTRIPS

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

All youngsters, including black and other minorities, need to be imbued with a healthy self-concept, a feeling of personal value and self acceptance in order to become responsible and contributing members of American society. Also, they must learn to respect and understand all members of our society. Instructional materials can provide a model in developing healthy concepts of self and others. The difficulty in doing this was noted by Miller (1970):

> Enlightened educators recognize that our educational system has failed in a most fundamental way to provide a relevant education for black and other ethnic groups. Few understand, however, the basic disagreement on educational issues that revolves around the differences in what is important and critical for black, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Indian, Oriental and various other ethnic groups. . . . In order to consider relevant curriculum materials for multi-ethnic learners in a technological age, the topic must be viewed from the perspective of those ethnic groups involved.

Johnson (1971) pointed out that a long standing practice in the recording of American history has been the treatment of the American Negro as the invisible man. Early in the twentieth century black historians and civil rights groups were interested in the treatment of blacks in

history textbooks. Johnson (1911) talked about the sins of omission and commission committed by white authors in history textbooks. Johnson argued that authors had studiously left out many creditable deeds of the black American. In 1939, White published a pamphlet, Anti-Negro Propaganda in School Textbooks, in an attempt to compensate for this lack. His publication included material generally omitted from textbooks. These early expressions by Johnson and White were concerned only with textbooks, neglecting the treatment of blacks in other teaching materials important to the educative process.

It was not until the middle of the century that additional progress was made in this particular area. The 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision was aimed at overriding "separate but equal" American public schools. In addition, this decision generated an enormous impetus to reevaluate the perceptions of black Americans and their role in the society, which in turn has produced new formulations of educational goals in American society. As a result of the concern for minority group children, educators have become interested in the treatment of blacks, who are America's largest racial minority, in instructional materials.

Many institutions and individuals have been forced to reexamine their preconceptions of minority groups as a result of black militancy and civil rights legislation calling for the just treatment of black people in American

society (Bingham, 1970). Martin Meyerson (1969), a prominent educator, has asserted that we must act boldly and effectively to help create a society in which dialogue and constructive tangible achievement will replace the violence and prejudice that threatens to tear our society apart.

In the study reported here the illustrations in filmstrips are viewed as having two functions. They may describe the caption in a frame of the filmstrip by presenting accurate concepts and visual details in close proximity to the caption or an accompanying recording. An illustration may also function as an interpretation of the caption by adding details, concepts and moods, which were not described in the caption or recording.

Illustrations in filmstrips may contribute to the cultural and social development of youngsters. Hurlock (1964) pointed out that what children see in pictures contributes to their development of both concrete and abstract concepts.

An examination of the kinds of contributions filmstrips are making to contemporary education in their projection of black Americans is worthwhile because of this medium's importance in the educative process. The positive treatment of black characters in filmstrips may assist youngsters in continuing to formulate answers to questions about race and further develop human awareness.

Educational research on the contributions of filmstrips to learning support the value of using filmstrips to reach this goal. Allen (1960) reported that:

> Filmstrips teach, and the combination of filmstrips with other types of learning experiences produces learning results superior to those obtained from one of the instructional materials (media) alone.

VanderMeer (1950) highlighted the importance of excellence in filmstrip pictorial content in his study of the contributions of verbal and pictorial elements of filmstrips. He stated that:

> When a filmstrip pictorial element is deficient in detail, definition, or clarity, it fails to contribute to the student's knowledge and may actually inhibit learning.

Dale (1969) in commenting on what instructional materials can do, said:

> Filmstrips can be extremely effective for developing heightened attention and for encouraging student and teacher participation in the learning process.

To acknowledge the potential of visual materials for making a positive contribution to intergroup attitudes is also to acknowledge its equally potent capacity for affecting these images negatively. The American culture's past record of ineptitude and bias in dealing with minority group images makes it crucially important to determine what kinds of images social studies filmstrips are projecting (Banks, 1969).

Social studies is concerned with a study of what man, in various ways and under a variety of influences, has

chosen to do in his group life or society (Woolston, 1969). Social studies filmstrips, used as supplementary material or in a complementary role, are a medium for transmitting cultural values. Kvarceus (1965) found that the Negro child can gain a great deal of personal ego-strength by being aided in an examination of his own place and history in American life and culture. Grambs (1969) buttressed this position by pointing out that black students respond with great interest to educational processes when information on their pasts, as well as new archaeological and historical material regarding ancient African cultures, is included in instructional materials. She found also that white students are startled to new cultural awareness by exposure to the materials about or including black Americans. The student who lives in affluent suburbia, who knows nothing except what he may hear or read about the problems that face minority-group children and children of poverty, will be changed and challenged by such exposure (Miel and Kiester, 1967). Grambs (1968) elucidated that the change will result in more acceptance of different persons and more acceptance of one's own difference from others. Thus, this kind of experience tends to produce a bicultural person, who is capable of functioning both in a sub-culture and in the mainstream (Baratz and Baratz, 1970). Filmstrips have the potential of providing each new generation with sound information about society and of fostering

healthy attitudes toward different cultures. In a world based on understanding, respect, and appreciation of human diversity, the concept of a pluralistic society rests on the acceptance of such attitudes.

Purpose of the Study

It is the purpose of this study to appraise the treatment of black Americans in a selected sample of social studies filmstrips designed for use in grades four through six in a public school system having a multi-racial composition. To appraise the treatment of black Americans in filmstrips available to children in a pluralistic society, the following questions established the framework of the study.

Do the filmstrips reflect the producer's sensitivity to stereotypes by the way the material is presented?

Do the filmstrips suggest that one racial segment of the population has a monopoly on worth, capabilities, or importance?

Are black children fairly and equally presented?

Are black adults fairly and equally presented?

Are black children given positions of leadership?

Are black adults given positions of leadership if adults appear in the filmstrip? (male and female)

Are there instances of integrated groups and settings to indicate the equal status of members?

Are nonsegregated social relationships indicated by integrated groups and settings?

Is the identification of blacks hindered by smudging color over Caucasian facial features?

Are the illustrations designed to produce positive images of racial groups regardless of their similarities and differences?

Do the illustrations convey the uniqueness and worth of black Americans?

The questions listed above are adapted from a set of evaluative criteria relating to minority treatment in instructional materials (Conte and Grimes, 1969). The Detroit schools, along with other city school districts, developed and adopted guidelines for potential users and producers of curriculum materials. These guidelines are based on a sensitivity to the treatment of minority groups in instructional materials. This study is based on questions adapted from the broad guidelines to be specific for filmstrips. It is viewed from the perspective that the treatment of black Americans in filmstrips makes a difference in an individual's view of himself and others; the mere representation of blacks in filmstrips does not guarantee that the concept of a pluralistic society will be fostered. The tenets which underlie the study are:

1. Elementary school children should be provided opportunities to view materials aimed at fostering the ideals of a pluralistic society and to gain knowledge about racial awareness.

2. Filmstrips have an influence on racial attitudes, values and concepts.

3. The school has a responsibility to develop positive intergroup relations and healthy racial attitudes.

4. Filmstrips portraying the interaction of blacks and other minorities with whites contribute to all childrens' self actualization as well as to their understanding and acceptance of racial differences.

5. Elementary school children do have the opportunity to view filmstrips either independently or with teacher guidance.

6. The filmstrips appraised in the study are presently shown in elementary school classrooms.

Importance of the Study

During the decades of 1950 and 1960, educators increasingly emphasized the inclusion of black Americans and the black experience in teaching materials. They expressed concern for the quality of educational media materials either to assist in establishing identity or to awaken the concept of America as a pluralistic society.

Materials can be structured to foster positive intergroup attitudes (Golden, 1964). As Stendler (1953) points out:

> . . . children acquire attitudes toward each other and toward groups of people in every phase of the school program, whether we intend that they should or not. Our job is to make sure that these are desirable attitudes and that we take advantage of every opportunity to nurture them.

Instructional materials aim not only to enhance the educative process, but also to transmit human awareness. Recently, professional and commercial groups, large city school systems, and non-profit educational corporations are attempting to include black Americans and other minority groups in appropriate and effective materials for use in the elementary schools.

Children who have been made aware of physical differences among races are also cognizant of the roles different racial groups usually perform in society. Trager and Yarrow (1952) point out:

> The child's concepts of race include not only the appearance of people of different racial groups but their occupations, their clothings, their living quarters and their personalities and abilities. These concepts become increasingly linked with racial concepts as children grow older.

Research indicates that curriculum materials can affect children's racial attitudes in a variety of ways. Caucasian childrens' attitudes toward blacks as worthy and acceptable members of American society may be affected by the nature of the presence or absence of blacks in instructional materials. Litcher and Johnson (1969) indicated in a recent study that the use of pictures illustrating children of different races together was effective in creating favorable attitudes in white children toward blacks. The children who were exposed to blacks in readers showed a reduction in the degree of preference for whites and the degree of social distance.

Lasker (1929) pointed out that when pictures reinforce erroneous concepts of racial characteristics, the pictures are materially adding to racial mis-education. He further stated:

> The picture fastens into the mind of the child more definite impressions than the text, impressions that last long after the text has been forgotten.

Goodman (1964) pointed out that children as early as three years of age are racially aware and white children as young as four act in a prejudiced manner toward blacks whom they consider to be inferior. She stated:

> It is this superposition of the whites, tacitly recognized by all and deeply resented by the subordinated brown, which constitutes the biggest single fact about race relations, and the most comprehensive idea to which our children are exposed. The idea is pervasive and it pervades silently, like a creeping fog, and it is just about as difficult to stop.

Some studies have been done on the treatment of blacks and other minorities in social studies textbooks, while other articles have focused on the treatment of minority groups in teaching materials (Golden, 1964; Banks, 1969; Klineberg, 1963; Durham, 1965; Larrick, 1965; Harris, 1969). But evidence was not located of a study dealing exclusively with social studies filmstrips used in the elementary schools. Especially in elementary grades four through six, filmstrips are the most widely used non-print medium in the public schools, and such a study seems important (Report on the Commission on Instructional Technology: To Improve Learning, 1970; Godfrey, 1967). Information is still needed about the treatment of blacks in instructional materials. The present study can help alleviate this need.

Deliminations

The limitations of the study are recognized to be the following:

CHAPTER II

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Two factors concerning black Americans have become increasingly clear to many educators in recent years. One is that the contributions of blacks in helping build America have largely been ignored in instructional materials. The other is that because of this disregard, concern has been expressed for the quality of educational media which would assist in establishing identity and awaken the concept of America as a pluralistic society (Filter, 1971).

The purpose of this study was to appraise the treatment of black Americans in a sample of social studies filmstrips designed for use in grades four through six in a public school system having a multiracial student body. To appraise the treatment of black Americans in filmstrips available to children in a pluralistic society, the following questions established the framework of the study.

> Do the filmstrips reflect the producer's sensitivity to stereotypes by the way the material is presented?
>
> Do the filmstrips suggest that one racial segment of the population has a monopoly on worth, capabilities or importance?

Are black children fairly and equally presented in the filmstrips?

Are black adults fairly and equally presented in the filmstrips?

Are black children given positions of leadership?

Are black adults given positions of leadership if adults appear in the filmstrip? (male or female)

Are there instances of fully integrated groups and settings to indicate the equal status of all members?

Are nonsegregated social relationships indicated by fully integrated groups and settings?

Is the identification of blacks hindered by smudging color over Caucasian facial features?

Are the illustrations designed to produce positive images of racial groups regardless of their similarities and differences?

Do the illustrations convey the uniqueness and worth of black Americans?

The filmstrips included in the investigation were from a population with the following characteristics:

1. Filmstrips that could be used in the upper elementary social studies curriculum.

2. Filmstrips that included at least one black American.

A random sample of forty (40) filmstrips was selected from the population. Twenty (20) were selected from the central office and the remaining twenty (20) were selected from ten (10) randomly selected elementary schools.

The instrument used in the study was adapted from the Detroit Public Schools Evaluative Criteria of Instructional Materials: Minority Treatment. The instrument, Evaluation Criteria, was adapted from the general guidelines to be

specific for filmstrips for this study. A panel of three persons was used to appraise each filmstrip using the evaluation criteria instrument. The data were analyzed to identify the filmstrips which fostered the concept of a pluralistic society.

In investigating the treatment of black Americans in the sample filmstrips Pearson product-moment correlations between the acceptability rating of the filmstrips and selected items on the Filmstrip Classification Sheet were calculated. The items were:

1. The chronological position of frames depicting blacks.

2. The occupational status of blacks.

3. The way blacks are portrayed in relation to other characters in the filmstrips (alone, with other blacks or with whites).

To determine if a difference existed between the filmstrips in the central office and in the schools on the thirteen items on the Evaluation Criteria Sheet the chi-square test was employed. The items were:

> Gives evidence on part of producers of the filmstrip of a sensitivity to stereotypes and the use of offensive material.
>
> Suggests overtly or by implication that no racial segment of our population has a monopoly on worth, capabilities or importance.
>
> Provides fair and well-balanced pictures of black children.
>
> Provides fair and well-balanced pictures of black adults.
>
> Presents black male adults in positions of leadership.

Presents black female adults in positions of leadership.

Presents black children in positions of leadership.

Demonstrates equal status in integrated groups and settings in situations where no leadership role is evident.

Indicates nonsegregated social relationships by including integrated groups and settings.

Hinders the identification of blacks by smudging color over Caucasian facial features.

Illustrates positive images of black and white Americans.

Emphasizes the uniqueness and worth of black Americans.

Conclusions

The appraisal of the selected filmstrips lead to the following conclusions regarding the population studied:

1. Most of the filmstrips do not reflect producers' sensitivity to stereotypes in presenting illustrations of black Americans.

2. While the actual number of filmstrips fostering the concept of pluralism was greater between 1960-1969 than in the past, the percentage of filmstrips not fostering pluralism was much higher within this decade also.

3. Illustrations conveying the uniqueness and worth of black Americans are rarely seen.

4. Because the majority of the filmstrips portray only one race (Caucasian), viewers are likely to infer that other races are less capable or less important.

5. There are limited illustrations designed to produce positive images of black Americans in the filmstrips.

6. When black Americans are illustrated in more than one section of a filmstrip the filmstrip tends to foster the concept of pluralism.

7. Filmstrips rated as fostering pluralism contain frames with black Americans in central as well as peripheral character roles.

8. When black Americans are portrayed in only manual and service type occupations the filmstrips are not rated as effective in fostering the concept of pluralism.

9. There is a positive correlation between the number of frames with black Americans in filmstrips and the acceptability rating.

10. The sex of the character in the filmstrip does not affect acceptability.

11. Filmstrips are not rated as effective in fostering the concept of pluralism when black Americans are continuously illustrated alone or with other blacks in the filmstrips.

12. Family unit situations with the adult black male are rarely illustrated.

13. Filmstrips produced after 1950 more often portray black Americans in less subservient roles than earlier filmstrips.

14. Black American children or adults are rarely presented in leadership positions.

15. Black American children or adults are rarely presented in roles similar to those portrayed by Caucasians in the filmstrips.

16. The identification of black Americans is not hindered by Caucasian facial features smudged by color.

17. Illustrations of fully integrated groups in social relationships are rarely shown.

Implications

The study and the conclusions drawn from it suggest many possibilities for further study. As emphasis on

inclusion of minority group members in educational materials increases, further definitive research in content and treatment will be needed. Some possibilities for further study are:

1. How are other American minorities presented in filmstrips--native Americans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Appalachians, and people living in rural areas? It would seem worthwhile to study the degree of pluralism which exists in relation to this facet of American society. Such a study is different from the present bandwagon approach to producing materials exclusively devoted to one racial or ethnic segment of the American population.

2. Additional evaluative criteria relating to minority treatment for specific instructional materials could be developed (e.g., 16mm films, multimedia packages). These criteria would serve as guidelines for producers and users.

3. A further study which would revise the criteria used in this study to be less specific, yet applicable to filmstrips, would be helpful in creating another alternative to evaluate the medium. To expedite evaluation of filmstrips, educators could view those illustrating people from the following stance:

   Do the filmstrips--

   1. Illustrate black Americans throughout the filmstrips?

   2. Give black Americans central as well as peripheral roles?

   3. Show black Americans in multiple occupational roles?

   4. Illustrate non-physical and physical interaction?

   5. Present black Americans in frames with whites?

Recommendations

This research reinforces the importance of helping young people acquire not only more adequate views of other persons but more adequate and self-supporting views of themselves. Young people need to use instructional materials where they view adults and children working together harmoniously. In order to accomplish this, the following recommendations are made:

1. Social Studies filmstrips should be evaluated and selected for public schools on the basis of evaluative criteria aimed at fostering the concept of pluralism as well as other qualities of content.

2. Filmstrips which are blatantly racist should be discarded.

3. It is the responsibility of the school to present and make available to students social studies materials which promote democracy in action and deed.

4. A greater number of black Americans and other minorities should be included throughout the filmstrips in realistic situations as is presently viewed with Caucasians.

5. Physical interaction should be included in filmstrips among dissimilar racial and ethnic groups.

6. Black Americans and other minorities should be illustrated in more central character role positions in filmstrips.

7. There is a need for filmstrips to illustrate minorities in family situations where applicable.

8. Black Americans and other minorities should be shown in all types of occupations.

9. A greater number of black Americans and other minorities should be shown in physical diversity which is representative of each racial or ethnic group (e.g., body builds, skin hues, hair coloring and texture).

If educators and materials producers are committed to the idea of fostering the concept of a pluralistic society then additional breadth and depth are needed in curriculum materials, i.e., illustrations of people of many ethnic backgrounds in realistic meaningful life roles. Where applicable all segments of the American population could be included naturally. Current social studies materials need to reflect the turmoil and harmony in our society and pose realistic and potentially productive problem-solving activities.